

Admittedly, it is rather difficult to find many instances where Congress and the president can reach agreement these days.

The House and the Senate are divided, and the president seems disinclined to work with Congress altogether. Given the ideological divisions that separate the political parties in Washington, last week's passage of major legislation to open markets and boost job creation was proof it is still possible for the president and lawmakers of all stripes to reach a consensus for the good of the country.

These free trade agreements have been a plank in the Republican economic platform since we regained control of the House, and the president has also talked about the need to approve these important agreements. So why did it take so long for the president to send the free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama and South Korea to Capitol Hill for a vote?

Each of the three accords was negotiated several years ago, but they were held back from Congress – which must grant its approval. Despite the objections from labor unions, in the end, common sense prevailed at the White House. Congress quickly and overwhelmingly passed the trade bills shortly after they arrived on the Capitol doorstep last week.

As we have all come to realize, our livelihoods are greatly affected by the global economy. What happens in other regions of the world affects business decisions, investments, prices and jobs here at home.

In recent decades, Alabama has not only embraced foreign trade, but we have welcomed many successful foreign-owned companies into our communities. Southwest Alabama is dotted with many such businesses, which provide good-paying jobs and tax revenues for local cities. And we hope to see more in the future. Efforts to encourage such foreign investment and trade are good business for everyone; and last week's passage of the three new free trade agreements is a positive development for Alabama and the nation.

While America as a whole has benefitted from international trade, Alabama, in particular has seen a significant increase in exports over the last four years, rising by 161 percent compared

to an 85 percent growth nationally.

According to figures from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in 2010 Alabama exported in excess of \$15 billion worth of goods, nearly evenly divided among the regions of the Americas, Europe and Asia. More than 35,000 jobs statewide were tied to these exports. Southwest Alabama saw over \$1.9 billion in exports last year, supporting nearly 3,800 local jobs.

Before the new free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama and South Korea were officially approved by Congress last week, Alabama had already seen the benefit of trade with these three nations. Since 1997, state exports to all three have dramatically increased: 175 percent, 198 percent and 187 percent, respectively.

If history is any guide, we should see even more business occur as a result of the new trade deals. For example, after the U.S. forged a free trade agreement with Chile in 2004, state exports to that South American country surged by 364 percent. We saw a 111 percent rise in exports to Singapore after inking a similar free trade accord with that tiny island nation.

After the House and Senate quickly passed the three free trade agreements last Wednesday, the president appropriately noted the benefit of working together to get things done for the economy and to grow jobs. However, rather than building on this positive momentum he also took a jab at conservatives in Congress, challenging them to offer a jobs plan of their own.

Truth be told, Mr. President, House Republicans have already drafted a jobs package and have been pushing for passage of its provisions for months only to be blocked by the Democrat-led Senate and the White House. However, when we also offered to consider portions of the president's own jobs bill, seeking to pass what we could agree upon, including additional tax breaks for businesses and workers as well as rolling back job-killing regulations, the president seemed uninterested.

When we called him to the negotiating table, he instead took off on a national publicity tour demanding that Congress pass his jobs bill. Last week, after the Democrat-led Senate voted down his bill, the president said he is willing to talk with Republicans on a jobs plan, but he would not stoop to discussions which "create a lot of theater." Frankly, it's hard to take the president seriously, when he has just returned from his latest political road show.

Speaker John Boehner reached out to the president last week to remind him that the House is ready to sit down to hammer out an agreement on jobs, just as we passed the beneficial free trade agreements. Results, not theater.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

For release: October 17, 2011